



California Teachers Empowerment Network

Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues

Please note that in addition to the traditional emailing of the CTEN monthly newsletter, we will once again post it on the CTEN blog - <http://www.ctenteachers.blogspot.com/> As usual, there are several controversial issues covered in this letter and we urge you to share your opinions with other teachers.

February 15, 2017

Dear Colleague,

Not that her detractors will go softly into the night, but at least Betsy DeVos is now in place as the Secretary of Education. While the teachers unions and other education establishmentarians are angry and fearful as to what she might try to do, the fact is that her powers are limited. As spelled out in rational way (a rarity on this issue), Fordham Institute president Mike Petrilli details her job description.

President Trump selected her to be the U.S. Secretary of Education. That person's job is to do education politics and policy—to work with members of Congress and governors, to understand how a bill becomes a law, to provide moral support to reformers as they fight it out in the states and at the local level. With her decades of involvement in politics, with policymakers, and in the trenches of the parental choice movement, DeVos is an inspired choice for the job that the Senate confirmed her for yesterday.

...During her confirmation process, DeVos promised time and again to shrink Uncle Sam's impact on the nation's schools—to devolve decisions back to states, communities, educators and parents. That's in keeping with the mandate from Congress, which just over a year ago updated the major K–12 law to expressly limit the federal role in education.

To read Petrilli's piece, go to <https://edexcellence.net/articles/actually-betsy-devos-is-perfectly-qualified-to-be-education-secretary>

Another article, this one by director of education policy at the Show-Me Institute, Michael McShane asks us to “Rethink School Accountability” and “Stop the outcry over DeVos' approach and consider real reform, instead.” His piece in *US News & World Report* starts,

In many Eastern religions, practitioners use mantras to calm and center themselves while meditating. If the school choice movement needs a mantra right now, it just might be: Regulating a market is not the same as regulating a monopoly.

I say this because of the huge outcry around the putative beliefs of Betsy DeVos, President Donald Trump's nominee for education secretary, on how to bring accountability to charter schools and schools that participate in voucher programs. Differing conceptions of accountability have become equated with being "for" or "against" the idea, in toto. But which is more strict? Requiring that schools be evaluated on an A-to-F scale and automatically kicked out of a charter program if they fail? Or establishing a mayorally-appointed commission to decide what schools should and shouldn't stay open? I actually don't know.

To continue reading, go to <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/knowledge-bank/articles/2017-01-31/as-betsy-devos-is-considered-3-ways-to-rethink-school-accountability>

The looming teacher (and other public employee) pension disaster for taxpayers is not news. But what has gone under-reported is that young teachers entering the field are carrying a disproportionate amount of the load. And if those teachers don't make teaching a career for life, they lose out. Big time.

All this is spelled out in recent a Fordham Institute report. As the introduction to the detailed 378 page analysis states, "A new teacher's pension is supposed to be a perk. The truth is that for the majority of the nation's new teachers, what they can anticipate in retirement benefits will be worth less than what they contributed to the system while they were in the classroom, even if they stay for decades." The even sadder news is that no one in a position of power seems to be willing to do anything about it.

The report's author EdChoice's Martin Lueken found that the median "crossover point" of the fifty-one districts across the country he examined is 25 years, which means that teachers in more than half of these districts have to teach a quarter of a century before they reach the point where their retirement benefits are worth more than their contributions.

To read more of this eye-opening report, go to <https://edexcellence.net/publications/no-money-in-the-bank>

The latest entry by the National Council on Teacher Quality on teacher evaluations is out. *Running in Place: How New Teacher Evaluations Fail to Live Up to Promises* is part of the tenth annual publication in the *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* report series. The report "finds that within the 30 states that require student learning measures to be at least a significant factor in teacher evaluations, state guidance and rules in most states allow teachers to be rated effective even if they receive low scores on the student learning component of the evaluation." The report also includes recommendations for how states can address this problem.

To access the report, go here - http://www.nctq.org/dmsStage/Final_Evaluation_Paper

On the school choice front, New Hampshire State Senator John Regan has penned an article which extols the virtues of choice.

Ed Choice (formerly Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice) has presented 33 empirical studies all showing positive results from school choice. Twenty-eight of these same studies (a whopping 85 percent) showed positive, or neutral fiscal effects. Other studies show a higher level of awareness of both civic values and responsibilities.

On a tour of a New Hampshire charter school, I asked what were some of the reasons why students choose to transfer to a charter school. The number one response: No bullying.

Another win for school choice is that of additional learning and higher test scores. Former Rep. Jason Bedrick, now a member of the Cato Institute, writes ‘ ... highly significant educationally meaningful achievement gains of several months of additional learning from school choice.’

To continue reading, go to <http://www.newhampshire.com/Another-View-John-Reagan-School-choice-leads-to-lower-taxes-and-better-education-01262017>

Also on the subject of choice “A Federal Scholarship Tax Credit: The Only Fifty-State School-Choice Option” is a thoughtful piece written by Thomas W. Carroll, president of the Invest in Education Coalition. He writes about a bill by Senator Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and Representative Todd Rokita (R-Indiana) that “proposes a federal tax credit for K–12 scholarships that is independent of state programs—much like federal tax credits for buying electric vehicles.” He also writes,

Not only is such a federal school-choice tax credit doable—it’s the only way President Trump can effectively bring school choice to families in the blue states that voted for him in 2016 and others that might in the future. No other solution can immediately benefit every American student. A competitive grant program, for example, would at most affect a half-dozen states. And categorical block grants that can be turned into school vouchers require state-by-state approval, meaning ‘choice’ states would likely allow, but ‘non-choice’ states would not.

To continue reading, go to <http://educationnext.org/a-federal-scholarship-tax-credit-the-only-fifty-state-school-choice-option/>

In January, Kentucky became the 27th right-to-work state in the nation, and this month Missouri became #28. In a few short years, the RTW movement has picked up considerably. Between 1947 and 2011, just three states opted for worker freedom. But since 2012, six states have been added to the RTW column, and others are moving in that direction. And that’s not the only bad news for the unions. In November 2016, the National Right to Work Foundation, along with the Liberty Justice Center, filed a brief on behalf of two Illinois government employees. Mark Janus, a child support services worker at the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, and Brian Trygg, a transportation engineer, resent their unions’ forced dues regimen and are suing them. *Janus v. AFSCME* could make it to the Supreme Court as soon as next year.

Also, three new federal court cases challenging the constitutionality of forcing public employees to pay union dues were filed in January. Government workers – including Pennsylvania teachers, California medical center employees, and New York school employees – are plaintiffs. These cases, being filed with legal aid from the National Right to Work Foundation, argue that “state requirements that the plaintiffs pay mandatory union fees as a condition of government employment violate the First Amendment.”

Then on February 6th, The Center for Individual Rights (the same group that brought the *Friedrichs* case) filed a lawsuit against the state of California and the California Teachers Association “on behalf of eight California public school teachers and the Association of

American Educators. The teachers are challenging California's "agency shop" law, which CIR says violates the First Amendment by forcing them to pay annual fees to the union – even if they are not a member.

To read more about the right-to-work legislation and litigation, go to <http://unionwatch.org/right-to-work-on-the-move/> and <https://www.cir-usa.org/cases/yohn-v-california-teachers-association/>

On a very different note, are you aware that, as recently as the 1960s, the NEA used teacher education materials with Biblical verses? For a few samples go here - <http://www.ctenhome.org/PDFdocs/4thGradeNEAJournal.pdf> To learn more about what the NEA was like in its pre-union days, go to <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006059304>

And finally, as you well know, information is frequently used to score political points and make cases for various causes. To that end, CTEN has a "cheat sheet" on our website – with original sources. To see it, go to <http://www.ctenhome.org/cheatsheet.html> If you have information that counters what's there or would like to see something added, please let us know.

Anyone wishing to make a donation to CTEN can do so very simply through a personal check or PayPal - <http://www.ctenhome.org/donate.html> As a non-profit, we exist and operate only through the generosity and support of others. Many thanks to CTENers who have already donated, and a special shout-out to those of you who do so on a regular basis.

Sincerely,
Larry Sand
CTEN President